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**“BELONGING WITHOUT BELIEVING”?
DIMENSIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON IN MODERN
GREECE**

1. Introduction

The analysis of the religious phenomenon appears nowadays to be particularly interesting, because it conduces to the re-examination of dominant paradigms of secularization, as is shown by the problematic of the present conference¹. The emergence of new forms and tendencies (i.e., believing without belonging, vicarious religion, new religious movements etc)² reveal the growing dynamics of this phenomenon and re-examine Europe as a “secular exception” in a “religious world”³. Every European country follows its own socio-economic and cultural path and attributes a different content to its procedure of secularization, which is related with new types of religiosity that afford common characteristics as well as differences, regardless of religion or dogma⁴.

Within this framework of religious fluidity, the opinion that Greece is an exceptional case, because of Orthodoxy, should be re-

¹ Paper presented in the Conference of the European Sociological Association, Research Network 34: Sociology of Religion, «Transformations of the Sacred in Europe and Beyond», Potsdam, September 3-5, 2012.

² See, Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, Sage Publications, London 2007, pp. 135-167. See also, Vasiliki Georgiadou, Elias Nikolakopoulos, “Types of religious commitment, ecclesiastical practice and political preferences”, in Th. Lipovats, N. Demertzis, V. Georgiadou (eds), *Religions and Politics in Modernity*, Kritiki Publications, Athens 2002, pp. 254-279 (in Greek).

³ See, Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 2002.

⁴ See also, Ch. Tsironis, “Measuring religiosity in contemporary Greece. Epistemological prolegomena”, *Culture and Research* 1 (2012) 67-82 (in Greek), <http://ejournals.lib.auth.gr/culres/article/view/2715/2653> (access on 25/6/2013).

vised⁵. The revision of the classical paradigms of secularization may include the case of Greece, which presents similarities and differences compared to the secularization process that took place in the rest of Europe⁶. Taking this into account, Greece may be considered to be a part of the puzzle of the religious landscape of modern Europe. It is a case that mirrors national particularities concerning the relationships between religion, nation, state and citizens, which gives Greece, as is the case in many regions of the world, its own religious identity.

In this paper we will try to delve into the religious phenomenon and its forms in contemporary Greece. We pose as our working hypothesis, the inversion of Grace Davie's thesis, advocating that what applies in the case of Greece is "Belonging without believing" instead of "Believing without belonging"⁷, as it seems that the Greeks have a stronger feeling of belonging than believing. The present paper tries to confirm this hypothesis based on the variables of religious self-definition and church going, using the European, as well as Greek, Social Surveys. It should be noted here that the analysis is quite schematic, therefore the topic cannot be exhausted, given the fact that for verifying the hypothesis, it is necessary to use not only quantitative but also qualitative research.

2. The secularization in Greece

Greece, as part of the western world, despite various historical adversities that obstructed the country from following the socio-

⁵ Some research, like for example Ioannis Petrou, *Church and Politics*, Kyriakides Publications, Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 81-94 (in Greek), recognizes that the secularization process takes place early in Greece (17th-18th century), despite the Ottoman dominance during this period. For the concept of "Greek exceptionalism", see more, Elisabeth Prodromou, "Some Notes on religion, State and Democracy: The Unexceptional, Yet Instructive, Case of Greece", in www.bu.edu/cura/programs/working%20papers/Prodromou%20lecture.htm (access on 25/6/2012).

⁶ See also, Efi Foka, "Religion and politics: Examining the case of Greece through European prism", in Kon. Zorbas (ed.), *Politics and Religions*, Papazisi Publications, Athens 2007, pp. 270-306 (in Greek).

⁷ See, Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing Without Belonging*, Blackwell, Oxford 1994.

political changes that occurred in Western Europe (Renaissance, Enlightenment, Reformation), actually participated in the secularization process in various ways. This process has been “accelerated” after the fall of dictatorship (1967-1974), in a historical phase that the constitutional democracy is established in Greece and the country is gradually incorporated into Europe. This period sees the revision of the Greek Constitution in 1975 that defines the function of democracy on the basis of people’s will and abolishes monarchy⁸.

Post-dictatorship governments take a series of regulatory and legislative measures that mainly concern civil code issues and “impose” their gradual disengagement from the Church. Issues such as civil marriage, name-giving without prior christening, the so-called “civil” divorce, the legalization of abortion, etc. constitute a series of measures that gradually liberate the organization of family life from Church influence and create a new framework of secular organization of family life for the Greeks. At the same time, the gradual integration of Greece into the European Community (now European Union) “enforced” it to accept a series of laws with secular character that guarantee the protection of human rights, religious freedom being included⁹.

The distinction between religion and politics is not always clear due to the fact that the Greek state recognizes the Orthodox Church as “the official (national) church”¹⁰. The “complicated” relationship between religion and politics is consolidated in the

⁸ See, indicatively, Antonis Manitakis, *The relations of the Church with the Nation-State*, Nefeli Publications, Athens 2000 (in Greek), Evangelos Venizelos, *The relations between State and Church*, Paratiritis Publications, Thessaloniki 2000 (in Greek).

⁹ It should be noted that, according to article 13, paragraph 1, of the Greek Constitution, religious freedom is established for all residents of Greece, be it Greek citizens or not.

¹⁰ For a typology of relations between state and church in the European Union, see Ioannis Petrou, *Christianity and society*, Vantias Publications, Thessaloniki 2004 (in Greek), Pinelopi Foundedaki, “Religion and state in Europe: Secularization and functional differentiation”, in Th. Lipovats, N. Demertzis and B. Georgiadou (eds), *Religions and Politics in Modernity*, *op. cit.* pp. 183-210 (in Greek), Basiliki Georgiadou, “Religions and politics in modernity”, in Kon. Zorbas (ed), *Politics and Religions*, *op. cit.* pp. 52-70 (in Greek).

Greek Constitution (article 3), according to which the Greek Church is recognized as the prevalent Church in the country. Although this formula, according to most constitutionalists, is interpreted as simply the majority church, it denotes the special relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Greek state that is expressed by the presence of the Church at public ceremonies, such as the oath taking of the President of democracy and government, the Episcopal confirmation to the Greek President of Democracy, the obligatory religious education at school, the non-taxation of church property, the recognition of religious and civil marriage as equal, etc.

The starting point of this special relationship lies in the historical bonds between Orthodoxy and the Greek nation and identity. The most important facts that determined this relationship are: the role the Orthodox Church played in the conservation of Greek identity during the Ottoman Empire (15th–20th century), the establishment of the Autocephalous Church after the Greek liberation from the Ottoman Empire (1833), the involvement of the Church in the Greek national liberation movements etc.

This privileged position of the Greek Church derives both from the historical relationship between Orthodoxy and national identity and the relationship between Church and State as it is described in the Greek Constitution¹¹. This situation creates a special place for the church in the public events and many times provokes conflicts that concern its relations with the constantly expanding secular state as well as its relations with the other religious communities. The issue of re-definition of relationships, or better separation between state and church is posed many times with greater or minor intention, depending on the facts that take place in the Greek political field; but the typical separation between the two institutions has not yet been achieved¹².

¹¹ Antonis Papanizos, "The identity of Greeks, ways of self-definition and the influence of Greek orthodoxy", in Chr. Konstantopoulou et al (eds), *"We" and the "others": mention to tendencies and symbols*, Tipothito – Giorgos Dardanos Publications, Athens 1999, pp. 135-151 (in Greek).

¹² Each time this issue comes up, the Church defends itself, usually in an apologetic way. For example, in the Encyclical, number 2824 (16.11.2005) it is reported that the "church was the par excellence factor of unity of the free Greek state, the main carrier of socio-philanthropic service,

3. The Church in the Greek public life

Despite the ongoing secularization in Greece, which is mainly confirmed by the distinction between the religious and political fields and the development of a secular state, the Church still constitutes a dynamic presence in the Greek public life with various interventions, conflicts and contradictions. The attempts of the post-dictatorship governments to be liberated from the religious influence (control of ecclesiastical property, civil wedding, “civil” divorce, etc) were faced with dynamic reactions on the part of the Church that tries to conserve its rights and generally its influence on the public sphere. The ecclesiastical reactions reach their peak at the turn of the 21st century, when the government of the time decided not to include religion on the identity card of the citizens, as a result of the secularization of the modern Greek state¹³.

The national-political field is considered by the Church to be the par excellence field of intervention. We could mention here the big demonstrations that were organized by the church in the 1990s concerning Macedonia about the issue of the name, which was appropriated by FYROM that claimed both the name and history of Macedonia after the collapse of former Yugoslavia and the broader nationalistic crisis in the Balkans. Since then, the official Church does not stop intervening in various ways, especially in national and educational issues, not only regarding Religious Education, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, but even regarding the courses of History, Ancient and even Modern Greek. The recent “political” intervention concerning the economic crisis provoked a lot of discussions, as the Church did not limit itself to providing support in issues such as poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, faced by a big number of Greeks

the unfailing source of artistic inspiration, the basis of humanitarian laws of justice, the definitive assistant in the work of our National Education”.

¹³ For this case, see, Lina Molokotos, “Identity crisis: Greece, Orthodoxy and the European Union”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 18/3 (2003) 291-315.

nowadays, but it came to criticize the official policies that dealt with the crisis¹⁴.

The tensions that are created do not seem to reduce the great and constant social influence of the church and its significant position in the public arena¹⁵. Relevant research proves that the Church as an institution enjoys the trust of Greek people on a regular basis, contrary to other institutions, such as the Parliament or political parties¹⁶. Besides, data, which results from research about the social capital in Greece, depict a high degree of trust to the ecclesiastical institution¹⁷.

Therefore, judging by the obvious, in the Greek public sphere appears the image of a politically active Church, especially in the national-political domain, that intervenes in the decisions of the state and asserts its own “interests”, either symbolic or material. Despite the conflicts with the Greek state, not only does the Church conserve its constitutional position as the prevalent religion, but also its symbolic meaning in the conscience of the majority of the Greeks.

¹⁴ See a series of articles in the newspaper the Vima under the title, “May the Church do politics?”, *Vima*, December 26th 2010, pp. A23-A25 (in Greek). See also, Niki Papageorgiou, “Religious discourse and social power. Church face to economic crisis”, in D. Koukoura, P. Skaltsis, V. Mitropoulou-Mourka (eds), *Education of love and freedom*, Vantias Publications, Thessaloniki 2012, pp.333-346 (in Greek).

¹⁵ See, Vasiliki Georgiadou and Elias Nikolakopoulos, “The people of Church. Aspects of ecclesiastical religiosity in Greece”, in the edition, *The public opinion in Greece*, Institute VPRC 2001 (in Greek), Christina Varouxli “Confidence in institutions”, in Charalambis et al. (eds), *Recent Social Trends in Greece. 1960-2000*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002, Theoni Stathopoulou, “Religiosity and confidence to institutions. Offing tendencies in Greece and Europe”, in Kon. Zorbas (ed), *Politics and Religions*, op. cit. pp. 161- 186.

¹⁶ See, Theoni Stathopoulou, “Religiosity and confidence to institutions. Offing tendencies in Greece and Europe”, in Kon. Zorbas (ed), *Politics and Religions*, op. cit. pp. 161- 186.

¹⁷ See, Antigone Lyberaki & Christos Paraskevopoulos, *Social Capital measurement in Greece*. OECD-ONS International Conference on Social Capital Measurement, London U.K., September 2002. According to a recent research carried out by Kapa Research, Greek citizens declare that they trust the Church after the army and business for the progress and the welfare of Greece. See, *Vima*, 11/11/2012, pp. A10-A11.

4. The relationship of the Greeks with the Orthodox Church

The position of Church in the Greek public sphere and its importance in the conscience of the Greek people is depicted by the high percentage of Greeks that define themselves as orthodox. On the contrary, the figures of church going that could be considered to be an indication of essential and not typical belonging do not correspond to the high percentage of the Greeks that define themselves as orthodox.

More specifically, the indicators of loyalty to Orthodoxy are high, because the great majority of Greeks declare themselves as orthodox. Comparing research that was carried out during the years 1987, 1994, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008 and 2010¹⁸, with small fluctuations, the percentage surpasses 87%. Despite the fact that the identity of research is different, we can compare the percentage of responses because they use, with small variations, questions such as: “Which dogma do you belong to?”, “Which religion do you belong to?”, “Do you belong to any religion?” and so on.

Table 1: Belonging to religion or dogma

Identity of research	Orthodox
Eurodim (1987)	89%
AMER 1994	95%
European Values Survey 1999	96%
European Social Survey 2002	93%
Kapa-Research / Π.Κ.Φ. 2006	97%
European Social Survey 2008	87%
European Social Survey 2010	93%

¹⁸ The research is not systematic, but carried out by various institutions that are indicated in the tables 1 & 2.

This data shows a strong identity relation between Greeks and Orthodoxy that, despite minor variations, reaches very high levels. However, this strong religious conscience does not necessarily mean high participation in the ecclesiastical life that could actually mean a strong Christian identity. According to the same research, the frequency of church-going, despite the fluctuations, is quite low and it does not correspond to the high levels of belonging.

Table 2. Frequency of church-going (%)

Identity of research	Every Sunday	At least once a month	On big holidays	In wedding, christenings, funerals
Eurodim (1987)	8	21	45	26
AMER (1994)	8	23	51	18
V-PRC (1997)	12	17	56	15
European Values Survey (1999)	-	34	62	- [There is no relevant question]
European Social Survey (2002)	27	28	40	-
Kapa-Research/ Π.Κ.Φ. (2006)	22	24	45	-
European Social Survey (2008)	19	22	43	-

European Social Survey (2010)	21	23	42	-
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Although church-going constitutes only one dimension of the polymorphous religious expression and behavior and does not always provide explanations about the quality of religious faith¹⁹, it is indicative of the relationship between the believers and their ecclesiastical community. So, the derived data reveal that, despite the increasing number of those who frequently go to church over the last years, their percentage still remain around one third of the declared believers.

The percentage of those frequently attending (every Sunday) remains at a low level until the mid-1990s, but it rises considerably during the decade of 2000, only to descend again at the end of the same decade. If we add those people who attend at least once per month, the attendance reaches 30% initially, rises about 45% in the middle of the decade of 1990 and the one of 2000, to slightly descend around the end of the decade. In any case, however, this does not reach the percentage of identification with orthodoxy. So, the level of participation in ecclesiastical life and worship is surely lower, compared to the level of belonging. It seems that the identity relation of Greeks with Orthodoxy does not “bring people” to Church. The indicators of church-going are low and do not by any means correspond to the indicators of belonging.

It is also an indicative fact that, if we move on to more specialized theological issues, the percentage of “positive” answers is even lower. For instance, according to recent research (April 2011)

¹⁹ See, V. Georgiadou, H. Nikolakopoulos, “Church going, religiosity and prier. An asymptotic relationship”, in P. Kafetzis, Th. Maloutas, I. Tsiaganou (eds), *Politics, society, citizens. Data analysis of European Social Survey (ESS)*, EKKE, Athens 2007, p. 127 (in Greek), Georgios Pastiadis, “The divisional conjunction of the frequency of church-going in the political behavior: A quantitative methodological approach”, *Review of Social Research* 130/ Γ' (2009) pp.75-92 (in Greek).

about Easter celebration, which is considered to be the most important one in the Orthodox Church²⁰, 41,8% believes to the resurrection of the dead, with a 26,5% to have answered “yes” and 15,3% “rather yes”. On the contrary, 48,1% have answered “no” and “rather no”, whereas 10,1% have responded “I do not know / I do not answer”.

In the question concerning the meaning of Easter, 36% declared that it is “a period of religious meditation” and 11,1% “an opportunity to go to the church”. On the contrary, 42,5% sees Easter as “an opportunity to practice customs”, 39,9% as “an opportunity for holidays and relaxation”, 15,1% as “an opportunity to be with my family” and 11,9% as “an opportunity to visit my village”. In addition, only 8% attends the mass to the end on Easter Saturday night, whereas around 80% remain at the Church until the moment “Christ has risen” is heard; the same percentage practices the customs related to Easter, such as dying red eggs, skewering the lamb etc.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the fact that the “confession” of being orthodox remains at high levels, the confession of faith that is expressed by church-going and acceptance of orthodox dogmas is considerably reduced and in no case corresponds to belonging. It is quite impressive that although the subjective indicators of religiosity are high, the objective indicators are relatively low and actually close to those in the rest of Europe. The combination of high belonging on the one hand, and low participation on the other, may denote a weakening of the religious identity of the church and its subsequent transformation into a national-cultural collective identity.

Finally, the Orthodox Church seems to preserve its mighty position against truly Christian faith. This allows for the confirma-

²⁰ This research was carried out by Kapa Research AE for the newspaper “The Vima tis Kyriakis” with the purpose of investigating public opinion on the way Greeks celebrate Easter. See, Maria Antoniadou, “We believe but we do not go to church ...”, *Vima*, 23/4/2011.

tion of our initial hypothesis that in Greece belonging is stronger than believing. It should be repeated here that the tendencies recorded are indicative and under no circumstances exhaust the religious phenomenon in Greece. For such an attempt more qualitative research should be carried out.